



City of Seattle
Gregory J. Nickels, Mayor



Seattle **HUMAN**
SERVICES Department

Alan Painter, Director

News Release

For immediate release
March 20, 2009

Contact: David Takami
206-684-0253; david.takami@seattle.gov

National ‘early reading’ conference meets in Seattle

SEATTLE - The U.S. Department of Education (DOE) will hold its annual national conference for new grant award winners of the Early Reading First Program, which helps improve the literacy skills of low-income preschool children. The conference will be held from March 23 to 26 at the Seattle Grand Hyatt Hotel.

The City of Seattle’s Human Services Department was awarded a three-year \$4 million DOE grant for its Seattle Early Reading First program in 2007.

“We welcome these important educators to Seattle,” said Alan Painter, Director of the Seattle Human Services Department. “We have seen first-hand how important early reading and early learning are to a child’s development and future academic success.”

The conference will provide hands-on technical assistance to new grantees from around the country. In 2008, DOE awarded 31 grants for a total of approximately \$110 million for Early Reading First programs nationwide. Conference participants will also learn about current research in the field of early literacy and discuss program challenges and barriers.

Student assessment scores from the first year of the Seattle Early Reading First (SERF) project are promising. After only one year, 83% of the students assessed in 11 SERF preschool classrooms achieved the goal set by DOE for the *end* of the three-year grant. Eighty-five percent of students scored above of 85 on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test; studies show that students who score 85 and above on this test are likely to excel in kindergarten.

The SERF program uses a language-intensive, research-based early language and literacy curriculum to develop oral language and vocabulary, phonological awareness, awareness of print conventions, and alphabet knowledge. Teachers and program supervisors receive special training from literacy experts and in college classes. Families engage with literacy learning activities at the preschools, in the library and at home.

The SERF program complements the City’s efforts to make 4-year-olds ready for kindergarten through the Step Ahead preschool program, funded by the Families and Education Levy. Seattle’s partners in the SERF program include Seattle Public Schools, Seattle Public Library, Child Care Resources, and University of Washington. Seattle’s program also partners with five community agencies including the YMCA of Greater Seattle, Denise Louie Child Development Center, We Are the World center, Causey’s Learning Center, and the YWCA.

###